

# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

## BULLETIN



Edited by  
**KENNETH WILLIAMSON**  
Director

---

Issued to the Friends of Fair Isle

Subscription, £1, 1s, per year

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY BULLETIN NO. 3, 1951

E D I T O R I A L

The spring of 1951 will perhaps go down in ornithological history as the Subalpine Warbler season. Our last Bulletin reported the capture of an adult male on May 23rd and the present one opens with a note of a male caught on the evening of June 9th. A third was observed at Cley Bird Observatory two days later.

One of the features of the spring migration this year was the sporadic late movement of some migrants, notably from June 9-11th, 13th (when a Bluethroat and Black Redstart were here), 18th, 20th and 29th. During the first period the weather-map was very complicated, and it is difficult to see how any birds could have reached Fair Isle except by drift across the northern part of the North Sea from the Dutch and Danish coasts. Winds were generally light westerly over France early on 9th, but easterly on the North Sea coasts of Holland, Denmark and England, and NE. in Scotland. Early on 10th the map shows an even more complex situation, but the general picture from Denmark across to Scotland is much the same. A ridge over this area was increasing on the night of 10-11th and calm weather prevailed over England and France.

Early on 13th a trough of low pressure, crossing the British Isles from the west, brought light W. and SW winds in its wake over the North Sea and its coasts, and such birds as arrived at Fair Isle must surely have come from the British area. Much the same conditions prevailed on 20th, this time caused by a depression in the Atlantic west of the Hebrides. The number of birds concerned in all these movements was very small, and one could perhaps dismiss them as stragglers behind the main spring migration. What they lacked in number, however, they certainly made up in quality.

The congratulations of all who are interested in the development of Bird Observatories - and indeed in the furtherance of ornithological studies generally - will be accorded Major R.F. Ruttledge and his associates for their valuable pioneer work at Great Saltee. John Weaving, who has done much to put this first Irish Bird Observatory on a sound footing, was unfortunately unable to take part in the spring observations this year. A full account of these observations has been sent by R.F. Ruttledge (see para. 22); they show the great potentialities of a closer study of migration in the Irish Sea, and leave one with the sincere hope that the Great Saltee will go from strength to strength.

Compiled by the Director, Kenneth Williamson,  
for the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust,  
August 5-10th, 1951.

21. A Second Subalpine Warbler Trapped

When I paid a routine visit to the Vaadal Trap on the evening of June 9th a small greyish warbler, showing white in the outer tail-feathers, rose from the stream-side and entered the trap. On going to the catching-box, I saw that it contained our second male Subalpine Warbler, Sylvia cantillans, of the season. A full note of the previous occurrence, the 7th for Britain, was given in Bull. No. 2, para. 20.

This bird showed some slight differences from the visitor of May 20-27th. The dark chestnut of the breast was not so rich, and the white moustachial streaks were less clearly defined. The chestnut "eyebrow" was present but not so noticeable. The wings and tail were very much abraded and there was a lack of pale fringes on the tertials and inner secondaries. The eye-rims were bright red, the iris buffish-brown and the legs pale brown. The basal half of the lower mandible was purplish-flesh and the tomia yellow. The wing-formula was: 1st primary 3 m.m. longer than primary coverts, 3rd and 4th equal and longest, 5th 1 m.m. shorter, 2nd 1.5 m.m. shorter, 6th about 5 m.m. shorter. Wing 57 m.m. (but very worn), bill 10.5 m.m., and tarsus 19 m.m. The weight was 9.28 g.

R.A. Richardson, Warden of the Cley Bird Observatory, Norfolk, informs me that a Subalpine Warbler was watched at Cley for several hours on June 11th. This is the first time the species has been recorded in England.

22. Spring Migration at Great Saltee  
S.E. Ireland

Personnel. R.F. Rutledge landed on Great Saltee Island on April 21st and remained until May 19th; W.H.H. Kenny, R.W.D. Newton and F.N. Young accompanied him but left on April 28th. R.S. Pollard, L.H. Mills and Mrs. Mills followed until May 12th, and K. Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy stayed from May 14-19th.

Report. A typewritten report has been prepared by R.F. Rutledge covering the period, giving detailed local weather observations, a schedule of the migrant species seen, notes on selected species and on trapping and ringing operations. The extracts given below are confined to the more important migratory birds and in a number of cases comments have been made as a result of consideration by R.F.R. and K.W. of the weather charts published by the Meteorological Office, London.

Trapping. A small Heligoland Trap built in the garden gave excellent results. A small portable ditch-trap and a hedge-trap were also in use and in all 214 birds of 19 species were examined and ringed. These were: Whitethroats 97, Willow-warblers 62, Sedge-warblers 18, Spotted Flycatchers 9, Grasshopper Warblers 5, Blackbirds and Hedge-sparrows 4 each, Corncrakes 3, Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps 2 each, and one each of Goldcrest, Whinchat, Redstart, Robin, Wren, Swallow, Cuckoo and Ringed Plover (a nestling on April 30th).

Laboratory. A Whitethroat taken at 1030 on April 26th had gained 0.9 g. when retrapped at 1945 on 27th. It was again trapped at 1720 on May 8th and showed a further gain of 2.9 g.

"Last May the few Whitethroats handled were all carrying ticks on the head, but this year only 3 birds of the large number examined had ticks, - a Whitethroat, a Sedge-warbler and a Corncrake".

Migration. "So few birds were retrapped, or were seen about in the evening, that it is clear a constant stream of Passeres was moving through the island by day". R.F.R. adds: "Not only did morning birds pass on during the day, but in some cases arrivals did not take place until afternoon. For instance, on May 13th there were no Wheatears in the forenoon, but a few arrived in the afternoon, as did also a Garden Warbler. Whinchats and Spotted Flycatchers arrived during the course of the morning". Notes on weather phenomena, the direction of flight, etc. are given under the appropriate species heading.

LINNET. *Carduelis cannabina*. Intermittent passage, the biggest numbers being 9 on April 27th and 6 on April 24th. With the exception of a single bird at 1745 on May 6th all were seen in the early morning, almost invariably flying NE. (once NE.)

YELLOW WAGTAIL. *Motacilla flava flavissima*. One on May 3rd, two on 10th, male on 12th and one on 19th, which arrived from the west. It will be recalled that Yellow Wagtails occurred

at Fair Isle and Isle of May on May 3-4th respectively (Bull. No. 2, para 13), and it seems likely that these were a part of the same movement. During the night of 2-3rd an extensive low was situated west of Ireland, and although a calm over the English Channel, North France and S.E. England was favourable for movement into the British area, birds using the Irish Sea approach would encounter moderate E S E wind which would drift them towards Ireland. If the wagtail movement was on a broad front, the birds on the eastern side, passing up the North Sea, would encounter a light E S E wind, which would explain the simultaneous occurrence at Fair Isle.

WHITE WAGTAIL. *Motacilla a. alba*. Two on April 30th were not identified subspecifically but a male White Wagtail was seen on May 17th.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER. *Muscicapa striata*. A few daily from May 6-8th and 11-17th inclusive. These seem likely to have been British breeding birds moving in: no Spotted Flycatchers reached Fair Isle until 19th and these, judging from the weather charts, must have crossed the North Sea.

CONTINENTAL GOLDCREST. *Regulus r. regulus*. A female was trapped on May 2nd, when a depression south of Ireland caused easterly winds over the Channel and southern Britain. The bird "immediately struck R.F.R. as similar to the birds he so carefully examined at Fair Isle, and to skins he had recently seen. The bird was markedly grey on nape and sides of neck and ear-coverts, giving the impression of a grey 'stole' round the neck. Whatever the creden-

stials of the British Goldcrest R. r. anglorum may prove to be, there is no doubt that this late travelling bird was exactly similar to those that visit Fair Isle, which are clearly of Continental origin ... It forms the second recorded instance of the Continental Goldcrest in Ireland (see Brit. Birds 44: 175 for the first)".

CHIFFCHAFF. *Phylloscopus collybita*, and  
WILLOW-WARBLER. *Ph. trochilus*. Chiffchaffs were moving (20 noted) when R.F.R. and party reached the island on April 21st; some Willow-warblers (15) were also seen, and whilst these increased subsequently (45 on the next 2 days) the Chiffchaffs passage virtually ceased. There was a rush of Willow-warblers (300) on 25th, declining on 26th (100), and 2 Chiffchaffs were seen on the first of these days. Another Willow warbler rush (80) took place on May 2nd, declining next day (30). The meteorological conditions with a low to the south of Ireland and a light ENE wind over the southern Irish Sea, indicate a westerly drift as the cause of these arrivals. Smaller influxes occurred on May 11th (30) and 13th (25); the last was a single bird on 18th.

R.F.R. comments: "The greatest rush took place after a night of fog with light SW wind; the fog cleared in the early morning, visibility becoming good and the wind E.1". These were undoubtedly British breeding-stock moving in. Early on 25th pressure was rising over the British Isles and winds were light variable in the west: the chart for 0600 shows a cold front advancing from the north, and this may well have been the cause of the fog clearance.



at Saltee. Conditions became more settled during 25th, with a light northerly airstream in the west and calm over northern France - very favourable weather for migrants desirous of reaching the British area. Similar anti-cyclonic conditions prevailed on May 10th and 13th, with rising barometer and light northerly airstream over most of Britain and North France. There was a small influx of Willow-warblers at Fair Isle on 11th (unlikely to have been due to drift) but our main passage did not start until 17th, when movement at Saltee was virtually at an end.

NORTHERN WILLOW-WARBLER. Ph. t. acredula. The high percentage of Northern Willow-warblers at Great Saltee is most interesting, and forms one of the most important observations arising out of this investigation. "In May 1950 R.F.R. felt sure that a proportion of the Willow-warblers passing through were of the northern form, and it is therefore pleasing to find that some of the birds trapped this spring were referable to acredula, eight being captured and careful notes made on their plumage". Some variation was found, but on the whole the birds were very typical. The very pale eyestripe, brownish upper parts, cheeks and sides of neck, and lack of yellow on the underparts were all most noticeable. In one case there was hardly any yellow at or under the carpal joint; in another, which had an almost white eyestripe, the only yellow (except under the wing) was a faint wash on the tibia".

These descriptions indicate that only those birds of the brown-and-white phase of

acredula (the type long known as eversmanni - see Ticehurst, "A Systematic Review of the Genus Phylloscopus", pp 27-30) were recorded as Northern Willow-warblers; doubtless others, showing a nearer approach to trochilus and not with certainty distinguishable in the absence of skins for comparison, were present. These brown-and-white birds, preponderate in the Willow-warbler population of Northern Scandinavia and NE Russia (Salomonsen, Arkiv for Zoologi 36: no. 17) and the occurrence of so many so far to the west is quite remarkable. Birds were recorded in the schedule for April 26th, May 3rd, 7th, 8th (4), 10-12th (2 each day), 13th (6), 14th and 19th.

Contrast with this the situation at Fair Isle, where, from geographical considerations, one would expect a much higher proportion of acredula than at Saltee. The ten birds trapped during May and compared with skins of both races matched the typical race. No attempt was made to distinguish races in the field, of course, except for one bird of this unmistakable brown-and-white phase of acredula, which was present with birds showing olive above and yellow beneath on May 28th. The meteorological conditions which prevailed during this period of May (and especially 12-13th, when one-fifth of the Willow-warblers at Saltee were acredula), seem to preclude the possibility of a westerly drift. It seems likely that the normal route of this race must lie well to the west, and as R.F.R. says, "we may find that this subspecies passes regularly along our coast, though up to now very few have been recorded".

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER. *Locustella naevia*.  
One or two were seen on most days to May 13th.

SEDGE-WARBLER. *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*.  
The main arrivals were April 26th (5) - a day  
behind the big Willow-warbler rush - May 2nd (10)  
May 11th (15) increasing on 13th (over 20).  
The first reached Fair Isle on 11th. For  
weather-data, see Willow-warbler.

WHITETHROAT. *Sylvia communis*. Passage,  
apparently in progress when observations began,  
peaked at 130 on April 26th, a day behind the  
Willow-warbler peak. Whitethroats were as  
numerous as Willow-warblers on May 2nd (80) and  
3rd (30) and rather commoner thereafter; they  
struck a second peak on May 11th (100) and 12th  
(80), numbers falling off subsequently.

BLACKCAP. *Sylvia atricapilla*. Male, April  
24-28th; female, May 2nd; male, 4-5th; female  
12th. The only GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin* was  
seen on May 13th.

WHEATEAR. *Oe. oenanthe*. Passage was most  
evident on April 22nd (10), 29th (6), May 1st  
(8), May 2nd (17) and 7th (18).

WHINCHAT. *Saxicola rubetra*. Movement of  
one to 3 birds on most days (4 on May 7th).

REDSTART. *Ph. phoenicurus*. Male, April  
21st; female, 22nd, and a pair next day. An  
anti-cyclone moving from North Britain into the  
North Sea, gave rise to an easterly airstream  
over England and North France, so that the

occurrence of these birds (rare in Ireland) was almost certainly due to westwards drift.

ROBIN. *Erithacus rubecula*. Singly, April 22nd (see weather-note above), May 2nd and 15th.

HIRUNDINES. Passage of House Martins *Delichon urbica* and Sand Martins *R. riparia* was rather intermittent and the latter were at no time so numerous as on the first day, April 21st (12). Swallows *Hirundo rustica* were fairly numerous on 22nd (40) but decreased towards the end of the month. They were 45 strong on May 2nd and 5th, increased again on 10th (18) and 11th (30), and peaked on 14th (150). R.F.R. says "As was the case last year movement, no matter from which direction the wind, had a NE tendency, though often NW., whilst sometimes birds left the isle flying N. The heaviest passage took place during a morning of N.2 wind and was almost exclusively to NE. Between 1050 and 1120 hrs. 52 birds passed, mostly in small parties. This was the most intense movement noticed and it began and ended very suddenly".

SWIFT. *A. apus*. Seven on May 1st and 19 next day, then fewer until 6th (11) and none after 8th until passage was renewed on 14th. During this later wave there were 23 on 17th and 34 on 19th. For flight-direction, see under Swallow.

HOOPOE. *Upupa epops*. One was seen on the ground and in flight on April 23rd (see weather note under REDSTART) and identification was fully substantiated by notes made by W.H.H.K.

CUCKOO. *Cuculus canorus*. One to 3 daily, April 25 - May 9th (except 5th); again from 13th.  
SHORT-EARED OWL. *Asio flammeus*. April 22nd.

RAPTORES. Single Merlins *Falco columbarius* April 22-27th, May 2nd and 5-6th. "One was disturbed from a freshly killed Corncrake, an item of food not specifically mentioned in the Handbook". Kestrels *F. tinnunculus* were seen April 23rd and 30th and two Sparrow-hawks *Accipiter nisus* were present April 29th, one remaining till May 2nd.

DUCKS. Shelduck *T. tadorna* passage, April 23rd (14) and 26th (6). Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* passage from May 11-13th (16 on 11th, 24 on 13th) and again 15-16th (18 on 15th). All were drakes.

GANNET. *Sula bassana*. Some passage, April 26-27th, and 6 on May 10th. First seen at the breeding-ledge, May 4th.

TURTLE DOVE. *Streptopelia turtur*. One or two on most days between April 21-26th and May 3-14th, but no marked passage as in 1950.

WHIMBREL. *Numenius phaeopus*. Regular in small numbers (Curlew *N. arquata* less regular) down to May 13th.

COMMON SANDPIPER. *Actitis hypoleucos*. One or two irregularly, the most being 4 on May 1st and 3 next day.

CORNCRAKE. *C. crex*. First, April 23rd; two May 2nd; one or two daily, 5-11th; one, 19th.

R.F. RUTLEDGE.

23. Spring Migration in the South of  
Shetland

L.S.V. Venables contributes the following observations on spring migrants in Dunrossness, south Shetland. Some notes on Fair Isle records have been added for comparison, and others will be found in Bull. No. 2, 1951, para. 13.

CARRION CROW. *Corvus corone*. Three on May 21st. (Two or three at Fair Isle, usually with Hooded Crows, May 10-19th).

ROOK. *Corvus frugilegus*. Flock of 60, plus a few JACKDAWS *Corvus monedula*, March 15th. Two Jackdaws on May 26th.

CHAFFINCH. *Fringilla coelebs*. A small movement, mostly males, between March 17th and April 21st (see Bull. No. 2, 1951, para. 17). A few males, May 3-8th, at least one in song.

SKYLARK. *Alauda arvensis*. Flocks were on the move until April 24th.

TREE PIPIT. *Anthus trivialis*. May 10th.

WHITE WAGTAIL. *Motacilla a. alba*. First seen on April 29th, a singing male.

RED-BACKED SHRIKE. *Lanius collurio*. Male on May 19th; females 22-23rd; two birds, 24th; male, 29th and female, 30th. (See Bull. No. 2, 1951, para. 19; also para. 25 below).

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER. *Muscicapa striata*. First, May 26th; three, 29th and five, 30th. (Five at Fair Isle on 30th).

GOLDCREST. *R. regulus*. Singly, April 23rd and 26th and May 10th. (At Fair Isle, two on April 24-25th and occasional earlier in the month. Also seen on Foula in April).

WILLOW-WARBLER. *Phylloscopus trochilus*. Some movement from May 20-28th.

WHITETHROAT. *Sylvia communis*. A few from May 3-30th.

LESSER WHITETHROAT. *S. curruca*. May 20th.  
GARDEN WARBLER. *Sylvia borin*. May 20th.

MISSEL THRUSH. *Turdus viscivorus*. Apr. 10th.  
SONG THRUSH. *T. ericetorum*. Movement from April 1-18th. (At Fair Isle, April 2-11th).

REDWING. *T. musicus*. Last seen April 20th.  
FIELDFARE. *T. pilaris*. Last seen May 9th.

BLACKBIRD. *T. merula*. Heavy rush on SE. wind, April 1st, birds staying several days. (See Bull. No. 2, 1951, para. 14).

REDSTART. *Ph. phoenicurus*. Few from May 22-25th.

BLACK REDSTART. *Ph. ochrurus*. Male on April 21st. (Adult male at Fair Isle, 24th).

RED-SPOTTED BLUETHROAT. *Luscinia svecica*. Male on May 26th. (At Fair Isle from 20-26th).

ROBIN. *Erithacus rubecula*. Last seen on May 30th.

WHINCHAT. *Saxicola rubetra*. A few from May 3-25th. (At Fair Isle from 4-31st, commonest 18-23rd).

HEDGE-SPARROW. *Prunella modularis*. Singly on most days from March 16th to May 3rd.

SWALLOW. *Hirundo rustica*. First seen April 30th. A "rush" on May 21st. (Constant flow through Fair Isle from May 16-27th).

HOUSE MARTIN. *Delichon urbica*. First seen May 9th. (None at Fair Isle till 17th). There was a very marked late May "hold-up" on the last day of which, 30th, there were 50 at Hillwell Loch alone. This "hold-up" extended at least as far north as Lerwick. All had gone by 31st. (No marked "hold-up" at Fair Isle).

SAND MARTIN. *R. riparia*. Singly April 26th and May 7th, 9th, 12th, 17th, 22nd, 28-29th. (Steady passage through Fair Isle, May 16-28th).

SWIFT. *A. apus*. Two, May 26th; two, 29th; one, 30th.

CUCKOO. *Cuculus canorus*. "Song" heard on May 25th and June 2nd.

GREY GEESE. Four Anser anser, April 21st. Three Anser albifrons, March 30th.

DUCKS. Female Gadwall Anas strepera on May 30th; drake Pintail A. acuta on April 22nd and a pair on 26th; drake Shoveller Spatula clypeata on April 26th and a pair from May 5-7th.



GREBES. Black-necked Podiceps nigricollis April 19th; Red-necked P. griseigena April 20th.

DIVERS. Flock of 16 Great Northern Colymbus immer April 26th. A young White-billed C. adamsii in the Bay of Scousborough, April 24th. First Red-throated C. stellatus April 3rd.

WHIMBREL. Numenius phaeopus. First seen May 7th. Flocks on 15th and 23rd. (First at Fair Isle April 26th and passage most marked May 10-11th, 15th and 21st).

GODWITS. Last wintering Bar-tailed Limosa lapponica April 4th; two Black-tailed L. limosa May 17th.

WOODCOCK. Scolopax rusticola. Few from March 31st-April 5th.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE. Phalaropus lobatus. First female, May 23rd; a male next day.

LAPWING. V. vanellus. Large flocks from March 8-9th.

COOT. Fulica atra. Last wintering bird left Spiggie Loch on April 9th. The Hillwell breeding population has increased from three to four pairs.

CORNCRAKE. C. crex. First heard, May 12th. (The first seen at Fair Isle were on May 17th).

L.S.V. VENABLES.

#### 24. An Expedition to Foula

On the initiative of some visiting ornithologists from Cardiff the Observatory party chartered the "Good Shepherd" for a journey to Foula on Saturday, May 19th, 1951, leaving North Haven at 4 a.m.

Much could be written of Foula, its people and the character of the island in comparison with Fair Isle; but the purpose of the visit was mainly ornithological, and this account will be confined to that subject.

On the outward journey of five and a half hours, little bird-life was seen apart from Fulmars and an occasional Gannet. About 12 miles from Foula Puffins and Guillemots began to make their appearance, and a Leach's Fork-tailed Petrel, Oceanodroma leucorhoa, flew past the boat. Several of those who saw it already knew the Storm Petrel well, and reported that this was a larger bird, distinctly browner and with a different flight.

Arctic Terns, S. Sterna macrura, were a pleasant feature of the inshore waters (Dr. Ian Pennie reported two breeding-colonies in 1948, Scot. Nat. 60: 157-163) and as we approached Ham Voe, the main landing-place on the east coast, we were greeted by the magnificent sight of four Great Northern Divers, Colymbus immer, flying out to sea, goose-like in proportions and in flight.

On landing, the party split up to cover

as much of the island as possible in the 5 hrs. available before we had to leave. Those who went up the Ham Burn valley saw a number of migrants, whilst those taking the southerly route saw a Peregrine, Falco peregrinus, and came within six feet of a Merlin, F. columbarius, at the scene of a kill, evidently sleeping off the effects of a Wheatear breakfast.

The following notes on the species seen omit some of the commoner breeding-birds previously mentioned in other lists, the most recent of which is the one by Dr Ian Pennie cited above.

GREY WAGTAIL. *Motacilla cinerea*. A male on the Ham Burn was an interesting record in view of the first breeding of this species on Fair Isle in the summer of 1950. (The bird was very probably a migrant, however: no Grey Wagtails were seen later in the summer when Donald Cross, and later G.T. Kay and J. Peterson, visited the isle - K.W.).

WHITETHROAT. *Sylvia communis*. The presence of four or five on Foula coincided with the start of a migration wave at Fair Isle.

LESSER WHITETHROAT. *Sylvia curruca*. One - also coincident with the arrival of a number at Fair Isle (see Bull. No. 2, 1951, para. 13).

WILLOW-WARBLER. *Phylloscopus trochilus*.

SEDGE WARBLER. *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*. Single birds of each of these species were seen.

ROBIN. *Erithacus rubecula*. One on the cliffs. (One at Fair Isle the same day)

WREN. *Troglodytes troglodytes*. Appears to be fairly numerous. Whereas on Fair Isle the breeding wrens are practically confined to the cliffs they were found in a number of inland territories on Foula.

SWALLOW. *Hirundo rustica*. At least a dozen were feeding over the lower reaches of the burn. Twice as many were recorded at Fair Isle.

HOUSE MARTIN. *Delichon urbica*. One, compared with three at Fair Isle.

SAND MARTIN. *Riparia riparia*. One on Foula, one on Fair Isle.

GANNET. *Sula bassana*. A bird in adult plumage was sitting on a pinnacle near the big Kittiwake colony at the NW. corner of the isle. It is unusual for Gannets to come to land except at their breeding-stations, and Foula is not one of these.

RED-THROATED DIVER. *Colymbus stellatus*. There was a pair on a lochan in the NE. part of the isle, but no nest was found. (Pennie failed to find a nest in 1948, but they had been reported breeding in previous years).

ROCK DOVE. *Columba livia*. Two birds on the west cliffs (Pennie found them very scarce).

WHIMBREL. *Numenius phaeopus*. Seven, six of them in one party feeding on a damp grassy area in the NE.

SNIBE. *Capella gallinago*. At least five were seen during the day.

REDSHANK. *Tringa totanus*. One on a marsh in the NW. of the isle.

KITTIWAKE. *Rissa tridactyla*. Nest-building was proceeding at the very large colony on the NW. cliffs.

COMMON GULL. *Larus canus*. Two were seen.

GREAT SKUA. *Stercorarius skua*. To quote Dr Pennie: "at once the show-piece and the scourge of Foula". Walking along the ridge from Hamnafield to the Kame we tried to estimate the population and first put it at 500 pairs. At any one time there were never less than 30 birds in the air around us, and at least as many visible on the ground. One of the party counted over a hundred at one bathing-pool. Their territories stretch to within a few feet of the summit of The Sneug (1372 ft.). After covering most of the island we decided that 500 pairs was an under-estimate and that the population is probably nearer to 750 pairs. However, it is very easy to over-estimate the size of a bird-colony and it was not possible to organize an accurate count on such a short visit. (Dr Pennie gave 400-500 pairs).

ARCTIC SKUA. *Stercorarius parasiticus*. Far outnumbered by the Bonxies and our estimate was 75 pairs. It is probable that there has been some decrease from the 250 individuals estimated by Dr Pennie in 1948. (James A. Stout gives a higher estimate, however, of about 150 pairs pairs).

The following species were also noted, but were not so plentiful as at Fair Isle: Raven, Hooded Crow, Starling, Twite, Wheatear, Eider Duck, Black Guillemot, Razorbill.

Commoner than on Fair Isle were House-Sparrow, Blackbird, Cormorant (does not breed at Fair Isle), Shag, Fulmar, Greater and Lesser Blackback and Herring Gulls, Kittiwake and Guillemot.

Any account of Foula would be incomplete without mention of The Kame, which at 1220 ft. is the second highest seacliff in the British Isles. Every member of the party visited this truly awe-inspiring feature and the grandeur of the scenery will live long in the memory. Countless thousands of sea-birds nest along this western seaboard, their cries adding to the wild remoteness of this "Edge of the World".

The voyage back to Fair Isle was uneventful except that a Fulmar, Fulmarus glacialis, was recorded as taking bread, thrown to a Herring Gull, Larus argentatus, which had attached itself to the "Good Shepherd". The fulmar was remarkably skua-like in the way it allowed the gull to pick up the bread and then forced it to "hand over". The gull, for its part, was obviously afraid of the Fulmar and always ready to make off when the Fulmar approached.

Ornithologically, the expedition was interesting in that it allowed a rapid survey of the status of the species resident on Foula and afforded a comparison between Foula and Fair Isle as stations for observing migration. On this occasion the species present were

though the numbers were fewer at Foula. This is understandable, since the wind had been SE. for several days and the majority of migrants would sight Orkney, Fair Isle or Shetland after drifting across the North Sea. Only a few would be drifted through The Roost and west towards Foula.

If some ornithologist were to spend a week or two on Foula during the migration season, setting up a temporary outpost of the F.I.B.O., a comparison between his records and those for the same period at Fair Isle would be of great value. It would be interesting to know, for instance, how visibility, wind direction and wind force affect the relative numbers reaching the two islands. Do more Iceland birds pass through Foula than through Fair Isle, and how does the spring migration compare with the autumn in this respect? Do extreme rarities turn up at Foula as regularly as they do at Fair Isle?

And so, as the sun was setting, we came back to Fair Isle, eager to compare our notes with those of the three observers who had remained behind. We felt thankful to those who had taken us to Foula and had made possible a most memorable day. The sun had shone on us for well-nigh eighteen hours and our impressions of Foula were of a grand island well worth visiting.

H.A. CRAW.

25. Midsummer Migrants at Fair Isle

During the months of June and July there was some unusually late migration. Field-work among the Arctic Skuas precluded a close watch over the south end of the island, otherwise the list of observations below would doubtless be more extensive. A few Shetland records are also included.

ROSE-COLOURED PASTOR. *Sturnus roseus*. An adult bird was flying and feeding with a flock of adult and juvenile Starlings *S. vulgaris* on Ward Hill on July 2nd.

HAWFINCH. *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*. A male was seen by James Wilson on June 17th, and by James A. Stout on 19th. This is the 6th record for the island - previous occurrences were noted in Bull. No. 1, para. 1. The bird was almost certainly a wanderer from the British area - a low centred off NW. Ireland caused a southerly airstream over most of England and Scotland, and a SE. wind at Fair Isle.

YELLOW-HAMMER. *Emberiza citrinella*. There was a male on the island, constantly in song, from June 11-20th. From 12-19th a female was also present, and an additional example was seen on 19th.

YELLOW-BREASTED BUNTING. *E. aureola*. An adult male in splendid plumage was collected by George Stout of Field, in the Lower Stoneybrake potato drills, on the evening of July, 13th. It is the 4th record for Fair Isle and the 6th for



Scotland, and apparently the first occurrence in Britain of an adult male. The bird was in very good condition, with a fair amount of orange-coloured subcutaneous fat. It weighed 25 g.

YELLOW WAGTAIL. *Motacilla flava flavissima*. Miss Garden found a cock bird on Buness on June 11th. All previous records are from the period late April to mid-May.

WHITE WAGTAIL. *M.a. alba*. Two on June 4th and one next day, and a very late male at North Haven on 22nd.

RED-BACKED SHRIKE. *Lanius collurio*. After the main passage of May 17th-June 2nd, males were seen or trapped on June 5th, 10th and 20th, and a female was caught on 29th. This bird, though heavily barred on throat, sides of breast and flanks, showed some male characteristics in the plumage of the upper-parts, having the crown feathers grey with brownish tips, and the hind-neck and rump grey. It was the heaviest of the birds trapped this spring at 32.92 g.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER. *Muscicapa striata*. One on June 5th and another on 20th. This bird was driven into the Gully catching-box by a male shrike but was removed unharmed. Donald Cross observed a Spotted Flycatcher at Foula on 13th.

WILLOW-WARBLER. *Phylloscopus trochilus*. Occasional birds during June, the last on 14th and 18-19th. The latter was trapped and was Ph. t. trochilus on the plumage of upper and underparts.

GARDEN WARBLER. *Sylvia borin*. Two on June 5th completed the normal spring passage, but a single late bird was trapped on 10th.

COMMON and LESSER WHITETHROATS. *S. communis* and *S. curruca*. Passage was virtually over by June 6th but one of each species appeared on 9th and two Lesser Whitethroats on 10th. The Common Whitethroat of 9th had the inner greater coverts of the right wing in moult. A female Common Whitethroat was trapped on July 6th following a night of light SSE. wind.

BLACKCAP. *S. atricapilla*. James A. Stout saw a female on June 5th, and the Venables had a late female in their garden at Noss, Scousborough, on June 18th.

SUBALPINE WARBLER. *S. cantillans*. A male, the second of the spring, was trapped on June 9th - see para. 21.

SONG THRUSH. *Turdus ericetorum*. Singly, June 2nd, 5th and 20th.

BLACKBIRD. *T. merula*. A few late migrants in June, notably on 17th, 20th and 24-26th.

WHINCHAT. *Saxicola rubetra*. L.S.V. Venables saw a late bird at Sandness, Shetland, on June 5th.

BLACK REDSTART. *Phoenicurus ochrurus gibraltariensis*. Jerome Stout trapped a female on Ward Hill on June 13th, the first June record for this species at Fair Isle.

RED-SPOTTED BLUETHROAT. *Luscinia s. svecica*. Jerome Stout of Busta observed one in his cabbage garden on June 13th.

SWALLOW. *Hirundo rustica*. Passage, which was strong on June 5th, continued until 12th. Single birds were seen on 18th and 20th, and 4 passed on 24th.

Visiting Foula in his yacht on June 13th, Donald Cross found a pair of Swallows nesting in a ruined croft at the south end.

HOUSE MARTIN. *Delichon urbica*. One, June 21st. Donald Cross, cruising off Hermaness in his yacht NIESSIK on June 5th, saw a considerable passage of martins and Swallows, the former in parties of 10-12, and the latter less numerous.

SWIFT. *A. apus*. Singly, June 18-20th at Fair Isle. L.S.V. Venables saw one at Vaila on 14th. Return passage was going on at Fair Isle, with a dozen or so daily, from July 26th.

CUCKOO. *Cuculus canorus*. Males on June 18th and 25-26th. The latter was taken in the Gully Trap and was a 1st-summer male retaining some juvenile secondaries in each wing. It is an illuminating commentary on the relative abundance of suitable insect food during the May drought, and in late June, that this bird's weight was 124.9 g. compared with 79.9 g. and 81 g. of the two captured in the earlier period.

SHORT-EARED OWL. *Asio flammeus*. One on June 9-10th.

KESTREL. *Falco tinnunculus*. A female was seen near Burrashield on June 18th and 23rd.

GREY LAG GOOSE. *A. anser*. A party of four was on the island from June 30th to July 3rd, an unprecedented occurrence.

SHELDUCK. *T. tadorna*. Two were observed flying over the north of the isle on July 20th, eventually leaving SSE.

SHOVELER. *Anas. clypeata*. L.S.V. Venables records a male at Spiggie on June 19th.

COMMON SCOTER. *Melanitta nigra*. Two females in the North Haven on June 23rd.

GANNET. *Sula bassana*. A 4th-summer bird was caught sleeping on the North Haven shore early on July 24th. It was a sick bird and died during the morning: there did not appear to be anything wrong with it internally, but one wing was slightly oiled and this may have prevented it getting sufficient food. The testes were small and it was obviously a non-breeder. It had one old brown centre tail-feather and the three outermost secondaries were blackish-brown.

HERON. *Ardea cinerea*. The first of the autumn arrived on July 26th.

TURTLE DOVE. *Streptopelia turtur*. Singly on June 5th, 18th and 25th.

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER. *Colymbus immer*. One was seen flying south off Bunness on July 5th.

CURLEW. *Numenius arquata*, and WHIMBREL *N. phaeopus*. There were the usual stragglers, one or two almost daily throughout June and into July. A flock of 7 Curlew passed S. on June 19th. Return movement of both species, Whimbrel predominating (7 on 15th, 15 on 29-31st), was apparent from mid-July.

DUNLIN. *Calidris alpina*. One at North Haven July 26th and 3 at the south end next day.

REDSHANK. *Tringa totanus*. Singly, June 27th. July 6th, and on several days after mid-July.

GREENSHANK. *T. nebularia*. Singly on June 22nd and August 4th.

RINGED PLOVER. *Charadrius hiaticula*. An adult and 2 juveniles for a few days from July 22nd.

LAPWING. *V. vanellus*. Six on June 15th and 3 on 20th; 3 also on July 21st.

QUAIL. *C. coturnix*. James Wilson saw one on Ward Hill on June 23rd.

## 26. Ringling Progress, June and July

June, with 271 birds, and July with 210, were both unusually good for bird-ringing, and brought our total to 1,041 (59 species). Over a hundred nestling Wheatears were ringed, and juveniles trapped since have brought the total for this species to 201.

## 27. Some Ringed Bird Recoveries

STARLING. Sturnus vulgaris. So far, only one of our 745 ringed Starlings had been reported from abroad - SK 81, a female trapped on October 25th, 1948 and found dead near TROMSO, North Norway, on March 20th, 1950, (920 miles NE). A female captured in the same Potter Trap on the previous day, October 24th, 1948, was recovered near FRASERBURGH, Aberdeenshire (150 miles S.) on March 24th, 1949. Others taken in the same trap at the same period were retrapped on the island during 1950, one of them in July.

A Starling marked as a nestling on June 7th, 1949, was found dead on board a Grimsby trawler in the North Sea, in Lat. 54' N. Long. 4' E., on October 31st, 1950. This is the second Fair Isle nestling to be recovered off the island, one having been reported from Noness, SANDWICK, Shetland, on October 25th of its first year. A female taken in the Observatory Trap on October 31st, 1950, was found dead at SANDAY, Orkney, in December; and a male in the same trap on October 27th, 1949 was shot at BIGTON, Shetland Mainland, in early March, 1951.

MEADOW PIPIT. Anthus pratensis. A bird caught in the Observatory Trap during a passage of this species on October 1st, 1949, was found dead at Wilskerke, near OSTENDE, Belgium, on December 30th, 1950 (about 620 miles SSE.). Another, ringed September 9th, 1950 from the Dyke Trap, was killed by a boy at Punta Galeo, near BILBAO, Spain, on October 8th (about 1150 miles due S.).

SONG THRUSH. *Turdus ericetorum*. A bird ringed on December 24th, 1950, was found dead at Charlottenlund, COPENHAGEN, Denmark, on April 12th, 1951 (600 miles SE.). Its weight when trapped, 73.44 g., together with the late date, suggest that the bird was wintering at Fair Isle. A racial assessment was not possible as no skins are kept here during the winter months.

BLACKBIRD. *Turdus merula*. An adult female caught in the Gully Trap on November 3rd, 1949 was found dead at FAGLUM, Sweden, on April 12th 1951 (600 miles E.).

An adult male taken in the Gully on Oct. 28th 1950 was found dead at KONSBERG, Norway, on May 3rd 1951, (400 miles due E.).

A 1st-winter male ringed on February 9th 1951 - probably wintering at Fair Isle - was reported from KJELLERUP, Central Jutland, on July 1st 1951 (500 miles SE.).

KESTREL. *Falco tinnunculus*. A 1st-winter female was captured in the Gully Trap on August 26th 1950, and in the Ward Hill Trap next day. It was reported from Jouy-en-Pithiverais, LOIRET, France, on December 29th 1950 (800 miles due S.).

TEAL. *Anas crecca*. The duck of a pair which were feeding on the Gully stream on the morning of June 4th 1950 was caught in the trap. It was shot at STRONSAY, Orkney, on January 29th 1951.

HERRING GULL. *Larus argentatus*. An adult caught in the Observatory Trap on July 5th 1950 was found dead at Strathaven Reservoir, LANARK-SHIRE, on March 24th 1951 (280 miles SSW.).

## 28. The Nesting of Wheatears in 1951

During the present season 40 nests of the Wheatear, Oc. oenanthe, were found at Fair Isle. Of these nests, 14 were in burrows (either dis-used rabbit burrows or, in a few cases, deep holes formed by the weathering of peat banks); 12 were in cavities underneath rocks, and 14 were in the drystone "dykes" or walls. With one exception (mentioned below) all the nests were at or beneath ground level.

The majority contained young old enough for ringing on June 21-23rd, so that most eggs must have hatched during the second week of the month. Young in 13 of the nests (mostly those in the drystone dykes) were unobtainable. The contents of the remainder were as follows:

1 nest	contained	7 young	
5 nests	"	6	"
9	"	5	"
7	"	4	"
2	"	3	"

Two of the B/5 nests also had an unhatched egg; one of the B/4 nests had two unhatched eggs and two had one infertile egg each.

Two nests in burrows on Buness (within 30 yds. of a stone wall) contained newly-hatched young as late as June 27th. One of these was subsequently destroyed by a predator - thought to have been a feral cat - and was the only one of the 40 nests to fail. The earliest dates recorded for fledging were June 21-22nd (two broods). At this time a partially built nest



was found in a stone wall at Shadler's Yard, placed  $4\frac{1}{2}$  ft. above the ground level. The female only was bringing material, though she was accompanied by the male. Young were eventually reared in this nest. Another late-nesting pair - the female a colour-ringed bird of 1949 - were feeding fledged young on the Brae of Lerness on July 21st.

A note was kept of the type of mating at each nest. In 17 cases the male was an adult bird, and in 23 cases was a 1st-summer bird, distinguished by the brown rather than black remiges and greater suffusion of buff on the breast.

The young are not much in evidence immediately after fledging, as they disperse to other burrows or holes in the vicinity of the nest. They stand at the entrance awaiting the arrival of parents with food, and on being disturbed bolt underground. Adults show much greater anxiety and are more noisy at this final stage of the fledging period than when the young are still confined to the nest. On June 21st two fledged young were removed from a burrow in which there was no nest, and on 27th two youngsters were extracted from a cavity under a large rock 50 yds. away from the nesting-hole in which we had ringed them 5 days before. This nesting-hole was still tenanted by one or more young, however, on July 2nd, so the actual nest-site may be used as a refuge for the young up to a week at least after fledging. These temporary refuges are easily distinguished from nest-burrows as the entrances become much soiled by faeces.

Female Wheatear F.0801 ringed as a juv. in August, 1950, was caught on eggs in a burrow on Buness on June 15th. She was mated with a 1st-summer male. Other recaptures are:

Male, ringed as juv., Gully Trap, August 10th 1950; in same trap, April 25th 1951.

Male, ringed as juv., Gully Trap, July 27th 1950; in same trap, July 12th 1951.

Male, ringed as adult, Observatory Trap, May 5th 1950; retrapped there July 1st 1950 and again August 10th 1951.

Of the 120 birds ringed in the nest in late June, 15 or 12½% were subsequently caught in the traps during July and early August. As the number of juvenile Wheatears entering the traps during this period was 110, and the brood-size average is 4.83 birds, this recovery rate indicates a minimum population of just over 280 pairs.

## 29. A note on Bird Parasites

A number of ticks, collected from spring and autumn migrants in 1950, were sent to Dr. F.A. Turk, who has kindly examined them and reports that they are nymphs of Ixodes reduvius Linnaeus 1758 (synonym, I. ricinus Linn.). "This tick", he writes, "is normally found on cattle and various small mammals, and there are but few published records of its occurrence on birds". Specimens were taken from the following hosts: Iceland Redwing Turdus m. coburni, April 25th; Scandinavian Redwing T. m. musicus, Sept. 26th; Greenland Wheatear Oe. oenanthe leucorhoa, May 28th; Pied Flycatchers Muscicapa hypoleuca, Sept. 12th; Blackbird Turdus merula, Oct. 10th.

### 30. Red-headed Bunting at Fair Isle

On the morning of August 8th, and again later in the day, Mrs. J. Anderson of Setter saw an unusual yellow bunting close to their croft. It was seen again the same evening by James Anderson and his sons, who watched it through a telescope as it sat on a wire fence near the yard. They gave me a detailed description which left no doubt that the unusual visitor was a male Red-headed Bunting Emberiza bruniceps. I was unable to find it during a search that evening, but James Anderson junr. brought me to it the next afternoon, and my wife and I were able to spend a considerable time watching it at close quarters. Once the three of us managed to bring the bird to within 15 yds. of Vaadal Trap, 200 yds. away from where we had found it, but the bird's final flight took it over the top! Later I set corn-baited Potter Traps in its favourite feeding-area, but with no success.

This is the second time an adult male of this eastern species has occurred at Fair Isle, the previous occurrence of September 19-22nd, 1950 being fully documented in British Birds 44: 118-9. The present example was not in such splendid plumage as the last, many of the feathers appearing very worn and faded. The wings were grey-brown, the primaries uniform, but the secondaries, tertials and major coverts variegated with whitish fringes, and the median coverts tipped white. The tail was a darker brown. The upper mantle and scapulars were greenish-brown streaked with darker brown. The nape was yellow, and the lower mantle and rump were of the same colour - a striking feature

when the bird flew, and visible as a narrow band between the closed wings when it was at rest. The lores, throat and ear-coverts were chocolate, the crown and forehead being paler, golden-brown (due I think to the feathers having yellow bases). The chocolate extended downwards to cover the sides of neck and breast, but the "bib" had an irregular outline and was very patchy on the left side, though well-defined on the right. The belly and under tail-coverts were bright yellow, the flanks paler, more greenish-yellow. The tarsi were flesh-colour and the bill was steel-grey darker on the culmen. It was unusually massive for a bunting, the lower mandible appearing disproportionately long and wide.

The bird spent the afternoon and evening in an area of pasture at Setter, feeding almost continuously on the seeds of various grasses. These it procured by reaching up and biting the seeds off the heads of the short stems. It took comparatively little food off the ground. Its gait was a hop, and the flight was swift and direct. If one approached slowly and carefully, it was possible to get within 30 ft. without much difficulty. The only call-note heard when the bird was disturbed was a quiet - sometimes barely audible - "pwip".

On August 4th one of our visitors, Mrs. Sackville Hamilton, reported having seen a yellow bunting with a greenish mantle a short distance north of Vaadal. On the following days George Stout of Field and James A. Stout had glimpses of a strange bunting, and it is probable that these incidents refer to the same bird.

The first Red-headed Bunting to be recorded in Britain came to North Ronaldshay, Orkney, on June 19th 1931. Last year a bird, which I saw alive in company with G.T. Kay, was caught in a Lerwick, Shetland, garden in early June, and in September this record was followed by the first Fair Isle bird. I understand that a specimen was taken at Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire, in May of this year, so that the present example would appear to be the 5th for the British Isles.

Postscript. James and Willie Anderson caught the Red-headed Bunting in the Vaadal Trap at 1800 hrs. on August 12th. The bird was ringed M.2228, and weighed 24.78 g. The primaries, of which the 3rd-5th were emarginate, were much too abraded for accurate measurement. Bil 13.5 mm, tarsus 20 mm., iris dark brown. The bird was returned to Setter following examination and was released there.

### 31. Dark Phase Fulmar Nesting in Shetland

During a visit to the island of Hascosay in late June 1951 G.T. Kay and J. Peterson of Lerwick found a Fulmar Fulmarus glacialis of the dark or "blue" phase sitting on an egg, surrounded by a number of normal birds. Kay colour-filmed the bird, and Peterson took a series of photographs, one of which has been published in "The Times". Observation (confirmed by photography) showed that the bird was a large-billed example, and therefore a mutant in the local population and not an arctic bird (see Bull. No. 1, 1951, para. 7). The site was revisited by J. Peterson in July, when a young bird of normal down-plumage had hatched.

# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

---

## THE WORK OF THE OBSERVATORY

The purpose of the Bird Observatory is to provide facilities for visitors to carry out scientific research on the island, not only in the sphere of ornithology, but in every aspect of Natural History. Work will be mainly concentrated however on ornithology under the supervision of the Director.

## TERMS

Full board, including service, is *Six Guineas per Head per week*. Reduced terms are available for parties of students from schools and universities.

## APPLICATIONS

Priority in bookings will be given to "Friends of Fair Isle," and to *bona fide* naturalists prepared to take part in the scientific investigations of the station under the leadership of the Director, and to help with such other duties as may be necessary from time to time in connection with the station or hostel. Anyone else wishing to visit the island will be made welcome, provided room is available. Those who are not keen ornithologists are asked to book for the summer months—June, July, and August—so that more accommodation will be available in the spring and autumn for students of bird migration. Application should be made as follows:—

- (1) *If made between 1st April and 31st October.*  
To the Director, Fair Isle Bird Observatory,  
by Lerwick, Shetland. Telegraphic address:  
"Migrant, Fairisle." Telephone Fair Isle 8.
- (2) *If made between 1st November and 31st March.*  
To the Director, Fair Isle Bird Observatory  
Trust, 17 India Street, Edinburgh.  
Telephone: Edinburgh CENTral 4532.

## PROSPECTUS

Prospectus giving details of transport to and from Fair Isle, and other information, will be sent on application.

# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

